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ABSTRACT

This paper argues against Australia's "One Literacy" (English only) movement, explaining that in recent years, there have been efforts to clear the curriculum of non-literacy subjects and activities, and noting the difficulty of determining what is and is not a curriculum distraction. It also notes that elementary students' English language reading and writing performance on standardized tests is unacceptably low and that some people feel that literacy performance is not being measured in ways sensitive to social factors. The paper suggests that to track the effect on languages and literacy of this literacy crisis, it is necessary to consider what fits under the terms "languages" and "literacies" and then trace which kinds of languages and literacies have not done well under the crisis. It examines problems for "One Literacy" (e.g., community languages in which the maintenance of linguistic and cultural heritage, and uninterrupted conceptual development from home to school, is a key goal), then discusses the following: transferring literacy; cultural insights from biliteracy; policy literacy; the origins, claims, and modus operandi of One Literacy; and problems with "One Literacy." It concludes by advocating "Australian Literacies," which would involve the mastery of multiple codes, diverse modes, and plural meanings of literate practice in contemporary Australia. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

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ONE LITERACY... OR DOUBLE POWER?

Joseph Lo Bianco

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LANGUAGE AUSTRALIA
THE NATIONAL LANGUAGES AND LITERACY INSTITUTE OF AUSTRALIA

ONE LITERACY ... OR DOUBLE POWER?

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LANGUAGE, LANGUAGES, LITERACY AND *LITERACIES*

One Literacy. In recent years we have been subjected to a curriculum enema. Its aim is to clear the curriculum of lots of non-literacy things; subjects and activities that distract from One Literacy.

If schools taught telepathic dentistry, wood-whittling and pencil case illumination by direct method (i.e. silently) I expect that 'society' might have come to some agreement that the time spent on such subjects could (in the face of a 'literacy crisis') be more profitably devoted to the Rs.

The task of clearing English-literacy-distracting time wasters out of the curriculum would then have been pretty straightforward. But, in general, schools don't teach lots of things that they shouldn't and in teaching literacy schools don't in general neglect to teach spelling and sounds. So, identifying what is, and what is not, curriculum-distraction hasn't been easy. And, worse, 'society' is not of one mind about the 'crisis' that we are having. There are three macro interpretations of our crisis.

Some think it is an uncomplicated matter. A straightforward case of English language reading and writing performance of primary aged learners on standardised tests being 'unacceptably low'. Unacceptably low, that is, compared to the performance on presumed identical tests of age-peer cohorts in things called 'comparable countries', 'the OECD' or 'our main trading partners'. This is a crisis of literacy.

Others think that technological and social changes so profound and pervasive are occurring that the very nature of literacy itself is being radically re-done. The policy response to this kind of crisis would be broad in its vision of what literacy is and multiple in its aims. Such a policy would aim to enhance 'literacy' in technological, cultural, aesthetic and other semiotic systems. A policy on literacy understood in 'old fashioned' ways (written language manipulation, or The Basics) is hopelessly inadequate in a context of rapid and deep change.

This is a crisis for literacy.

Still others hold that if we measure literacy performance in ways sensitive to social factors we don't find a generalised literacy performance crisis at all but a highly stratified pattern in which predictable social groups are underachieving in most or all things that might be called literacy. This is compounded by the intergenerational pattern of this underperformance among

the same predictable groups and therefore constitutes not a literacy crisis, but a repeating and deep social crisis. This is a crisis of literacy **in society**.

There are two minor inflections of this third broad interpretation. Both accept the social stratification thesis, but they diverge on what should be done about it. One view holds that for those groups named as a kind of literacy-disadvantaged category (working class boys, indigenous people, new immigrants, some disabled groups) ideologies of 'cultural preservation' or identity politics have got in the way of the need to gain English literacy for jobs and social participation. People who argue this position give emphasis to mainstream participation and relegate social and cultural difference to the margins. These people see a crisis of a **socially unequal literacy**.

The counter is that cultural assimilation has been tried in the past; it is a flawed kind of equality contingent on sameness and a cheap trick in any case. According to this view the poor and the marginalised were poor and marginalised when society demanded cultural sameness. In this view contemporary society must advance equality within and across difference, and not make conditional offers of equal treatment in exchange for cultural assimilation. For these people ours is a crisis of **monocultural and assimilative literacy**.

Whatever it is, this crisis that we are having, it has not been kind to 'languages' nor, even, to 'literacies'.[1] Whenever 'settled' or 'semi-settled' systems (like the balance between subjects and subject names in curricula, or a balance between methods of teaching) become disrupted through the introduction of a crisis damage comes with disruption. Some damage is collateral, some deliberate.

WHICH ONES AND WHY

To track the effect on 'languages and literacies' of the Literacy Crisis we need to first consider what fits under the term 'languages' and under the term 'literacies' and then trace which particular kinds of 'languages' and 'literacies' have and which have not done well under the crisis.

By process of elimination we can say that something called 'language' (which is of course involved in every subject of schooling) has not been especially troubled by the literacy crisis, nor particularly by One Literacy. Language was there before the crisis and will still be there after. By this I mean language as an abstract entity, language as medium of education.

Under 'languages' there has been selective damage, and some of this has been serious and some possibly deliberate.

If we judge by the number of things that are now called *Literacy* that used to, even quite recently, be called 'Something Else' (ESL, Migrant Literacy, language arts, mother tongue, enrichment, language experience, Reading Corner, Big Book, New Book Week) it would appear that this Literacy thing has done rather well out of the crisis.

In stock market talk we could say that *Literacy* is pursuing a strategy of Mergers and Acquisitions.

In thinking about which specific programs and activities under the term 'languages' have been affected by One Literacy it is necessary to distinguish two categories. I will call (for desperate want of a better term) 'elite and/or foreign or second languages' Category A. In this category students study languages of cultural prestige or of powerful trade partners or languages that are clearly not local in some significant way. Category A is largely oblivious to the crisis. I will use the term Category B languages to mean 'maintenance language education and specialist ESL'. Category B has felt the full brunt of the crisis and One Literacy as The Solution.

I anticipate that some teachers of what I am calling 'elite and/or foreign or second languages' might object to this term, at least to the adjectives elite or foreign. They might protest that all they are doing is trying to teach Italian, German, Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese as second languages, ie to students who don't have a background in Italian, German, Chinese, Indonesian and Japanese and that such teaching is good. Good for the students, good, more broadly, for the society. Teaching these languages in this kind of way is of course highly desirable, for a myriad of reasons that I myself share, and have long argued for, and will continue to argue for. On the face of it this objection is valid.

However, there is a sense in which the terms elite, foreign and second are the only correct and compelling ones for the argument I am making. 'Elite and/or foreign or second languages' distinguish a class category for which there is no ready alternative label and it is precisely the status, distance and sequence (status i.e. elite; distance i.e. foreign and sequence i.e. not-first) that count as far as One Literacy is concerned.

I am conscious also that these are broad and not watertight categories. There are marginal cases and there will be cracks through which to fall. Nevertheless, I want to work with this distinction for a while because I think it correlates with a pattern of social discrimination. For Category A programs One

Literacy is no foe; for Category B programs One Literacy has rained down confrontation, even hostility, undermining and de-funding.

Category A languages (and the kinds of curricula and program types that Category A lend themselves to) are privileged in relation to Category B. But only in the sense (and soley for the purposes of the present argument) that a discourse of *addition and skill* attaches to how we talk about what the learners are engaged in under these programs whereas for Category B we tend to use a *compensatory* rationale. This has made programs in the latter category vulnerable to the predations of One Literacy which holds that compensation through attention to cultural, prior linguistic and other background factors distracts from the singular objective of One Literacy.

In Category A we find languages (along with their literacies) in which, typically, learners have no background in the language. In these programs there is no 'maintenance' rationale among the purposes for teaching the language. These are learners engaged in acquisition of a new language. In some cases there may be a distant heritage attachment to the language but rarely any kind of active community association. In the Category B we find languages (along with their literacies) in which the learners are typically background speakers; or learners who have background identification with the target language but may not actually speak it.

Society in the first case is seen to be making efforts to impart skills that are useful to individuals and to the wider body-politic (these days the *body-economic*) of Australia. Society in the second case reserves the right to assess the language education efforts largely in terms of their contribution to English literacy norms and standards since it is the lack of these that is being compensated *for* by attention to 'background'.

Category A may have suffered minor and collateral damage, the negative effect, probably unintentional, of focussing extreme attention on one aspect of the curriculum making it harder for others' needs, problems and representatives to be heard. Category B has had its very existence directly threatened, and, directly or by implication, has been accused of making the achievement of something called 'acceptable literacy standards' more difficult.

One Literacy operates this kind of double standard in relation to non-English languages and literacies. Languages and literacies of identity, community and primary intellectualisation are inconvenient, problematical and therefore targeted.

Literacies that are challenged by One Literacy tend to be the critical, cultural and socially contextualised views of literacy; those that stress that literacy is a kind of practice that has a social ecology and set of relationships and values in the same kind of way that 'language' clearly has. Also challenged are pedagogical approaches other than those that conceptualise literacy education as perceptual and technical procedures for encoding and decoding; individually based and skills oriented. One Literacy prefers psychological understandings of human functioning over social ones.

ONE LITERACY'S TARGET AND COLLATERAL

In Category B languages we find, in ascending order of problems for One Literacy:

- Community languages in which the maintenance of linguistic and cultural heritage, and uninterrupted conceptual development from home to school, is a key goal;
- English as a second language, both for indigenous and immigrant children (best understood as a professional specialisation designed to meet general education needs of non English proficient learners) and, most problematically for One Literacy;
- Aboriginal bilingual education programs which aim to 'maintain' the indigenous language (or to revive its use), provide a conceptual platform for subsequent English learning, and which proclaim wider cultural revitalisation and maintenance purposes as well.

I think this goal of maintenance is seen as a serious problem by One Literacy because maintenance involves *intergenerational* retention of language skills and cultural competence. One of the mainstays of sociologically oriented studies of language is that intergenerational retention of minority languages requires exclusive social space, and institutions, that function largely or totally in the non-English language. Transmitting a language intergenerationally, therefore, involves social structures, environments and arrangements (such as community controlled schools and community controlled print and electronic media) that function in linguistic and cultural modes that are outside those of the dominant or mainstream parts of society.

Intergenerational is a big no-no for One Literacy.

Aboriginal bilingual education has been directly confronted to prove that it does not get in the way of 'acceptable literacy standards', most dramatically by

the December 1998 Northern Territory government decision to remove funding (Nichols 1999; Miller 1999) while the federal government stood complicitly by (Lo Bianco 1999a and 1999b). The English as a second language specialisation for immigrant children has similarly been subjugated to the One Literacy imperative. In some places ESL has been sent back to broom-closets, nationally it has been refused admission as a legitimate factor in explaining and improving educational assessment and appropriate learning pathways for children into mainstream schooling (McKay 1998a and 1998b; Lo Bianco 1998). The claim that ESL-ness and cultural background variables are factors to be taken account of in addressing ESL learners' English needs is to risk being accused of not 'aiming high' (Davison 1998). The jewel in the crown of One Literacy is the In National Literacy and Numeracy Benchmarks and here ESL learners, by any measure overly represented among the underperforming students in English literacy, are simply 'at risk'. To a lesser extent community language teaching has also felt the brunt of One Literacy (Lo Bianco 1998 and 1999).

Among the literacies there are also targets. Pedagogies and literacy understandings that can be located in the 'growth and heritage' family of approaches and draw on progressivist, empowering and child-centred traditions of educational practice are not favoured. These are seen sometimes to be teacher indulgences which have let us down. Approaches that identify educational practice with ideologies of social analysis and potentials for social transformation have tended to suffer by the kinds of testing, reporting, teaching and talking about literacy that One Literacy prefers

TRANSFERRING LITERACY

As is often the case with movements that seek to remove complexity from public life there is an inverse relation between power and knowledge in One Literacy.

Like economic rationalism with which it is genetically connected One Literacy is part of a wider politics in which: "What governments want most is less complexity and more governability" (Pusey 1981:9 in Moore 1996b: 38).

One Literacy takes it for granted that teaching literacy in the first language (if it isn't English that is) takes away time from literacy in English, that 'time on task' is unproblematically connected with ultimate English proficiency outcome. Taking time for first language and culture literacy is taken to mean aiming lower[2], pandering to minorities, foregrounding background and not

realising that English is indispensable for economic success and jobs. One Literacy takes it as axiomatic that English literacy is more important than other kinds of literacy and disagrees with claims that you can and ought to have both (*Double Power*), or more, because it is considered that it is just so much messing about with things that ought be to simple and clear-cut.

Of course, it isn't clear cut, or not that clear cut. While it seems counter intuitive to claim that time spent on More-than-One-Literacy (biliteracy) will not result in deteriorated English language proficiency, this is in fact the widely supported conclusion of sustained empirical research. Additive bilingual and biliterate enrichment is an idea whose continuing refinement has been the product of more than three decades of research in several countries. One of its most influential representations has been in the now famous interdependence hypothesis; (no longer a hypothesis since it has been subjected to intense scrutiny) proposed most clearly by Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Researcher Dr Jim Cummins in the mid 1970s.

Linguistic interdependence is based on the idea that there is a common or shared proficiency that underlies the two languages of a bilingual. In education this holds that the two languages are intimately connected in bilingual children's learning sustaining "...the well supported finding that the continued development of bilingual children's two languages during schooling is associated with positive educational and linguistic consequences" (Cummins forthcoming and personal communication). In a forthcoming book Cummins reviews the now two-decade long assessment of the interdependence idea (and a related but distinct notion about threshold relationships in academic L1 proficiency and their relationship with academic L 2) (Cummins [1]forthcoming, Cummins 1996). Cummins' and others' work on the **interdependence** (not merely the connection or association) between L1 and L2 proficiency in bilingual children is a counter to the 'time on task' approaches to learning English literacy, because it argues that under certain conditions less *initial instruction* in the L1 will result in equal or greater *eventual* L2 proficiency. These conditions are those of educationally supportive additive bilingual and biliterate education.

Of course, learning second languages inevitably involves learning second literacies (Lotherington 2000) and can support English literacy as well. But this is a Category A issue, in which learners secure in their English add skill in an additional language and its literacy. For Category B the languages concerned are not 'second' and therefore additional but 'first'[3] languages and therefore

intellectually foundational. English is second, sequentially, and, because of this, second also in terms of children's need for uninterrupted learning between home/mother tongue conceptual development and school/second language conceptual development.

The relationship between languages (i.e. bilingual skill gained in schooling) and (English) literacy has been an important area of research for decades. The consensus from Australian and international research is that languages learning has either a neutral impact or a positive impact on non-English speaking background learners' English literacy performance, depending on which aspects of English literacy performance are isolated and how the variables are controlled. It also depends on what we call things. If 'cognitive advantages' includes verbal abilities such as concept and vocabulary knowledge, deductive verbal reasoning, and metalinguistic knowledge, then such 'cognitive' measures are enhanced as a result of additive bilingual enrichment, if 'cognitive advantages' means 'non-verbal' only then bilingual enrichment is inconsistently or weakly associated with it.

If we take 'reading' as a proxy for literacy performance in more general terms then the bulk of reliable evidence similarly does not augur well for One Literacy simplifications.

The research shows that the ability to read transfers across languages. This happens even when the writing systems are different. Studies cited in Krashen (1996) indicate that reading ability transfers from Chinese to English, Japanese to English, Vietnamese to English, Turkish to Dutch; Cummins (forthcoming) shows evidence for starting reading ability being dependent in L2 based on knowledge of spoken L2 at initial levels of reading but much enhanced when based on L1 reading (see also Cummins 1996).

Whether transfer is involved or not there are major issues of achievement. For indigenous children English literacy results have been consistently low and students from a language background other than English on average have lower English literacy levels than students from English speaking backgrounds (Masters and Forster 1997:20). Cahill (1996) has also reported similar difficulties for ESL learners.

The bi part of bilingual and biliterate is often overlooked by its critics, preferring to see bilingual and biliterate education as a methodology for the neglect of English rather than a program of pedagogical intervention for two-language mastery.

Literacy transfers do not just occur across languages and scripts, but across

contexts and within languages and scripts. One Literacy is hooked on the idea of innoculation. Early literacy intervention acts like a kind of protection against adult literacy problems, kids' literacy performance in science and mathematics based subjects, other subject areas literacy practices and requirements, secondary school literacy demands and other kinds of literacy which may have more or less integration with image (moving or still), icon, technology and so on. These acknowledgements would require a literacy policy in which complex and multi-faceted interventions would be central rather than marginal.

CULTURAL INSIGHTS FROM BILITERACY

For children who are learning languages where the writing system is based on Roman script the cross lingual impact of L1 (non-English) literacy is noticeable and positive. The data that I'm talking about are not even isolated just to children who study the language for a long period of time and achieve a high level of skill in it. There is supportive evidence from some Melbourne schools where English speaking children who had been studying Italian for short periods only of between 6 and 8 months. These children's English word attack and word preparedness skills were significantly better than those of control groups who were learning only in Italian or only in English (see Lo Bianco and Freebody 1997).

There may be something about the objectifying effect of learning that the same sounds can be represented in a different way, grapho-phonemically, that produces the idea in children that there is a kind of arbitrariness about writing. This seems to make it possible for children to understand the relationship between script and spoken language form more readily.

There is considerable evidence from Australia and from other English speaking contexts that indicates that for English speaking children studying a language other than English the awareness of the arbitrary nature of the writing system that English uses comes earlier and more profoundly to them than it otherwise would.

In fact it would hardly come at all if you just assumed that the writing system that you use and the language that you use are the only way that it's possible to write and speak.

Children learning different languages with different scripts seem to develop an early awareness that even basic conventions like how print is represented on paper are arbitrary or cultural and can gain from these insights ideas about

writing as a constructed artefact of human societies.

This kind of cultural awareness of diversity is of course only valuable if you commence with the idea that diversity is valuable, and that public education should have a pluralist orientation to society, and life in general, as one of its goals. One Literacy may not share such goals. Both Category A and Category B language programs can gain justification and support from such cultural and cross-cultural insight because both are predicated on the assumption that diversity is inherently important and one of the fundamental purposes and fulfilments of public and compulsory education.

POLICY LITERACY

The reasons and the politics behind why Category B languages have been made vulnerable to One Literacy are important and interesting. To understand the double standard, and to contest it, requires us as languages teachers or researchers, and our professional associations, to develop another kind of literacy. I call this 'policy literacy'. It is clear that there is often more to policy than the face level claims made by Ministers and Departments around their policy announcements.

Policy literacy is not merely needed to interpret and understand what we are handed as 'policy' by those who govern us. We need to be policy literate so that we can form coalitions of interest between teachers and professional associations who represent minority language interests with those who represent 'second' language interests to advance a better treatment of language interests in general, and minority ones in particular. For me this means a project of counterposing the ideology of Double Power to the ideology of One Literacy. Part of this policy literacy is to identify the One Literacy sleight of hand; it feigns concern with the restricted social opportunities of minorities but its offer contains a conditional clause. One Literacy purports to advance 'socially empowering literacy skills' but it demands assimilative compromise. It is premised on a flawed commitment to backgrounding difference, and background. It is not English literacy that Double Power contests, but English-literacy-only.

In his analysis of policy Ball (1993) distinguishes between policy as text (the legislative or administrative documents that announce policy) and policy as discourse (the talking and writing that goes along with the making of policies). It is to such a wider notion of policy that we will have to turn to see most

clearly the anti-pluralist agenda to which One Literacy has dedicated itself. Policy texts can be pristine in their genuflection to pluralism, to multiple cultural and linguistic realities; while giving life to programs and pressures that negate institutional and social space for pluralism.

THE ORIGINS, CLAIMS AND *MODUS OPERANDI* OF ONE LITERACY

One Literacy is my name for an undeclared movement. I argue that One Literacy commenced with the backlash against multiculturalism progressively developing in Federal policy on education for most of the 1990s. I think the Australian Language and Literacy Policy of 1992, issued by Minister John Dawkins (significantly titled Australia's Language) commenced this process of 'talking down' pluralist interpretations of education, and distancing multiculturalism as a basis for making language policy. Most Federal Ministers and many State Ministers since then have engaged in the 'divisive prioritisation' (Moore 1996) that has been a technique of One Literacy.

In addition to 'divisive prioritisation' One Literacy has engaged in another method for advancing its cause that I would like to call the notion of an exclusive national interest. The idea is that now that literacy has been admitted to the realm of national policy interest the views of community members, social minorities and 'professionals' are judged to be self serving and kept at a distance. The exclusive national interest is nested in a primarily economic view of public policy, and literacy has been transferred into that domain.

One Literacy has since been taken to its zenith levels by Dr Kemp's literacy agenda of 1997, during which time it became promoted to a crisis (Freebody 1997 and 1998).

One Literacy's goal and agenda is for a singular, measurable, narrowly defined, English-only literacy to be applied to all schooling in Australia. The Policy texts don't explicitly declare much of what the programs, funding, assessment modes and criteria, bureaucratic and organisational delivery modes eventually constitute. A strategy of One Literacy is attach itself to two side discourses: the *Exclusive National Interest* and *Future Employment*. One Literacy is the national interest and jobs. And relatedly the right to determine the national agenda. It implies heavily that minorities (and often the professionals who work with them) are self-serving and therefore incapable of whatever it takes to have any input into the national interest. This claim has

the bizarre possibility that there exists some kind of nation that is separate from the people that constitute it.

Or is it that some citizens will have policy *done to them* or *done for them* while the rest of us, as One Literate citizens, are free to shape our own futures? The binary of basic literacy for the masses and cultural literacy for the elites is by now an old program.

One Literacy is concerned with notions of literacy as an instrument principally of the competitive economic positioning for Australia in OECD rankings against standardised, internationalised tests. To do this it helps greatly if Australia's learners are as homogenous a group as possible, and therefore subject to assessment regimes based on statistical and educational normalisation. One Literacy responds by silencing the differences that complicate Australia's participation in international ranking exercises, by declaring that any claims that language background differences should be 'taken into account' in assessment (McKay 1998a and 1998b) are unacceptable since they require admitting to policy matters that complicate the procedural requirements of international and intra-national comparability.

One Literacy is an ideology of singularity, it establishes a divisive prioritisation of English-only literacy and marginalises other literacy claims, including non-language literacies, but especially minority languages literacies, and very especially indigenous minority literacies. Adult literacy programs are marginalised because they form part of an ideology which holds that literacy is a set of practices grounded in social contexts and influenced by technology, social position and relationships, adult literacy is part of a claim on societies for a continuing education provision which governments seeking smallness of targets and goals, reductions of outlays and diminution of responsibilities do not want to hear.

One Literacy is a discourse that transcends political parties; it has two Number One ticket holders, John Dawkins and David Kemp. Mr Dawkins is the left hand book-end and Dr Kemp the right, and between these the One Literacy chapter has been written.

One Literacy is a mode of thinking about the overriding importance of low-skills English literacy and of the 'maximum exposure' route to ameliorating poor measured English literacy; such that other claims are relegated to the periphery of concern. Low skills are constructed as a problem for jobs and as a proxy measure for average education levels that can be contrasted internationally. Defining literacy narrowly and associating 'it' with the

economy are notions which were inaugurated (perhaps not fully explicitly) in Australia's Language, and taken further by Mr Dawkins in his pronouncements on language, his policy funding decisions, and especially in attaching literacy funding strongly to labour market training.

Literacy is now a superordinate term that describes primary education, its goals and purposes and imagines itself only possible in English. Not 'literacy' of course but Literacy. This politics of naming reached its maximal point in the only parliamentary debate in recent years on the human rights involved in indigenous language maintenance. In that debate, in December 1998, the Federal Minister was unable even to associate the term bilingual education with anything other than something called 'literacy', thereby making this the sole norm against which two-language education should be validated (Lo Bianco 1999b). Validating bilingual education only in terms of English literacy gains has the perverse consequence that if tested language outcomes from a given bilingual education program were to show that it was 'no worse' in its impact on children's English literacy than, say, ESL or English 'sink or swim' submersion, the program would come under pressure to close down because the cost-benefit logic of public policy would deem it too expensive.

However, as the same debate reveals, this association of *literacy* with English-only and bilingual education as being overwhelmingly connected with 'literacy' is a transparty-political tool. I refer to the interventions by the Leader of the Opposition. Once the One Literacy logic is manifested in innocuous sounding things like National Performance Benchmarks, National Plans, and Nationally Agreed programs of various kinds One Literacy seems to take on an aura of both common-sense and inevitability. One Literacy takes its place in a wider political package that re-imagines and re-envisions public culture in monolingual and monocultural modes. To argue against these good-sounding and Ministerially-responsible constructions is to seem to be raining on the parade of progress towards making the public aware of what the outcomes of Commonwealth outlays on education are, against sensible administration, and against government sincerity about addressing 'unacceptably low literacy standards'.

In the United States the question of the relation between learning in a second language in transitional bilingual education (initial first language instruction followed by a rapid transfer to English-only instruction) has also become a question of enormous political significance. In a recent book Stephen Krashen evaluates the appropriation to political ends of research

evidence in relation to the outcomes from this kind of bilingual education (Krashen 1999). I fear the same will evolve here. One Literacy says that to be equal minorities must be like the rest, part of One Australia. But surely the condition of *sameness* for in exchange for *equality* is truly an 'unacceptably low standard' given the reality of difference; and doomed to failure given the pervasive association of social background factors with educational attainments.

WHAT IS ONE LITERACY'S PROBLEM?

All languages are what English is: forms of speech and community expressed in practices of communication which are possible to be written down and that have a possible kind of condensation in script and text. More than one is better than one.

Critical literacy theorists are strenuous in their arguments about the socially transformative potential of critical literacy; arguing that literacy teaching which focusses on code-breaking literacy is basal in pedagogy as well as in social ambition. We can extend this to the logically doubly socially transformative potential of intellectualised and academically sustained bilingual critical literacy[4].

It is clear that One Literacy is not much concerned with languages in general. It is equally clear that it is very concerned with programs that only occur in particular kinds of languages and for particular kinds of Australian children. The Policy as Discourse of One Literacy seems to mean that these children should be like everyone else: English speaking monolinguals learning a foreign language.

Communities that aim to transmit literacy in and through non-English languages, first, seem to trouble One Literacy because of the presumed damage that this effort will have on English literacy. This time-on-task preoccupation is unproductive in bilingual contexts where bilingual additive enrichment is imperatively justified by the social environment of children's lives. Worse, for One Literacy and its alter ego and intellectual progenitor, One Nation, to keep a language alive, and to transmit it intergenerationally, requires certain kinds of institutions and social space for the speaker communities. It is an established principle of socio-linguistics that these social and language domains must be for the principal occupancy of the minority language for it to flourish. Given the power disparities between English and minority languages in Australia these domains will be invaded rapidly by the exclusive use of English if

energetic compartmentalising arrangements and efforts are not made to retain active and non-ritual use the other language. Eventually language shift would take place and these domains would give way totally to English.

The problem for One Literacy is that the institutional space that minority languages and communities require for intergenerational language transmission must be community controlled or at least subject to the interests and influence of minority language communities and the pace and nature of change regulated by them. The validation of progress and learning must be judged against norms internal to the community; negotiated alongside mainstream institutional expectations. This requires the control of resources, influence over institutional structures and arrangements that would establish community norms in association with wider social and economic parameters as benchmarks of success.

It is inevitable (social and economic forces make it so) that in such environments the demand for English literacy will be insistent and high. Despite its self-characterisation, One Literacy is not a response to community demands for giving minority language children control over society's most powerful semiotic code. One Literacy is a caricature, a set of simplifications of literate practice with a desire to standardly impose these onto all of public education. The forthright rejection by the great majority of indigenous communities in late 1998 of the narrow criteria for judgment of bilingual education's results indicates that One Literacy does not emerge from community concern about English literacy achievements of minority pupils. Its prescriptions are a cultural, economic and social price too high to pay.

I share the skepticism that Martin Nakata (1999: 16) expresses about the abuse of 'cultural preservationist' arguments that seek to regulate the kind of attention to English literacy achievements that indigenous, or for that matter, all, linguistic minorities seek. The key word is abuse. Language and traditional culture are not all there is to identity. And the bi-part of bilingual and biliterate education provides ample space for Nakata's justified insistence of enhanced English literacy pedagogy. In my critique of One Literacy I share Nakata's caution against paternalistic policies that offer a kind of palliative identity. When he argues that "the teaching of English is geared down, down to functional purposes" we would do well to recall that it has been minority language communities (see Cahill 1996) who have been in the forefront of advocacy for appropriate and adequate attention to English teaching for minorities in Australia. It is indeed an abuse for something called 'cultural

preservation' involving the teaching of traditional languages to be "... used to undermine the arguments for teaching English (Nakata 1999:17).

First language cognitive abilities (especially if the measures employed to track these abilities include verbal performance indices) relate to second language cognitive and academic language performance in *interdependent* ways; the two languages of bilingual children are not brain-separate but intimately connected.

It is salutary to read Cahill (1996) for the long history of pre-multicultural educational inequality (when English-only is all there was, and when One Literacy was ontology). We can only describe that educational practice as neglectful submersion. A buoyant secondary labour market absorbed immigrant young people for whom schools did little and for indigenous children the general societal apathy and indifference meant intergenerational neglect of extreme proportions.

Public advocacy, even militancy, for cultural diversity grew from and out of a prior and connected commitment to justice and equality in the education of minorities. Socially transformative objectives emerged from an initial focus on the life chances and opportunities for children whose linguistic and cultural backgrounds correlated with social and economic disadvantages and which had resulted in decades of assimilative pressure, and educational neglect.

Is it a mere coincidence that among the educational interventions most damaged by One Literacy has been ESL?

DOUBLE POWER

I have argued against One Literacy and called its prescription narrow and damaging. I advocate a different kind of literacy.

I advocate *Australian Literacies*. This involves the mastery of the *multiple codes* (languages and other semiotic systems), *diverse modes* (print, electronic and other) and *plural meanings* (participatory notion of citizenship within a united but multicultural polity) of literate practice in contemporary Australia. These *codes, modes and meanings* involve Australian English, indigenous varieties of Australian English, and other community and foreign languages; literacies of language and non language literacies plus critically engaged kinds of writing and reading for power and a citizenship of participation.

Academic-literate English objectives and pedagogical practices are intimately part of Australian Literacies.

Monolingual English literacy would deprive Australians of insights into worlds fashioned outside of English thinking (worlds activated daily by millions of others including other Australians) and in a time of rapid and almost-complete globalisation, worlds profoundly relevant to Australian public policy. Language literacy alone would deprive Australians of technological, artistic and other hybrid and non-print literacies. And, making low order routines synonymous with literacy and the objective of Literacy Policy would deprive Australians of critical engagement with texts that don't, after all, simply and unproblematically carry the world's messages, but which shape, fashion, create and constrain the possible worlds we inhabit. Critical and productive literacies, readerly and writerly literacies, literacies for active and participatory citizenship is a more appropriate literacy goal than One Literacy.

Mandaway Yunupingu said it better when he pointed out that '...becoming an educated, literate person in and across two cultures, Yolngu and Balanda' gives Double Power.

ENDNOTES

1 In schooling there are entities called Language, Languages and Literacy. While few schools would name an entity called Literacies in their curriculum plans the term is growing in popularity. There seem to be four main sources for this.
   - Teachers and researchers of languages, especially those concerned with non-alphabetic literacy who see 'reading and writing' in different script forms as demanding different pedagogical approaches and tapping different learner systems.
   - The widespread adoption of the term Literacy as a sort of index of 'competent functioning' in some field (e.g. Asia literacy, Political literacy, Social literacy)
   - Anthropologically-oriented research work (influenced by such people as Shirley Brice Heath in the US and Brian Street in the UK) which sees literacy as a kind of assemblage of practices that vary according to context and purpose and not therefore well understood as a unitary capability that is transferable over time and place, and including a critical literacy dimension in which influence, ideology and positionality in texts is identified and discussed, and in which students are taught powerful registers of writing and reading.
2 See articles by McKay, Davison & Lo Bianco, Australian Language Matters, 1998, vol. 6 No. 4.
3 In reality this is not always strictly the case, since some so called mother tongue, or first language, programs are 'language revitalisation programs' because the children only have a listening competence and an identity relationship with the language; it is sometimes the (grand) mother ('s) tongue. However, language maintenance objectives for these programs still carry the idea of intergenerational 'maintenance'.
4 For reasons best known to themselves critical language theorists are often silent about how English-only literacy advocacy imperils bilingual education.

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